

Interactive Multi-Media in Large Core Courses

In Search of a Textbook for an eReader Generation

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Abstract

This study explores how students use learning resources – traditional paper textbooks and etexts – in "Introduction to Musicology," a required large course for Bachelor of Music students. For this study, the researchers designed a new multimedia module on John Cage (a highly influential musical figure), which was assigned for optional/extra credit use in the course. The researchers distributed a post-survey to all 125 students in Musicology 140 after the module test was completed, and there were 99 responses, a 79% response rate. The survey addressed students' reported use of traditional and etextbooks, as well as their views of the role of these resources in their learning.

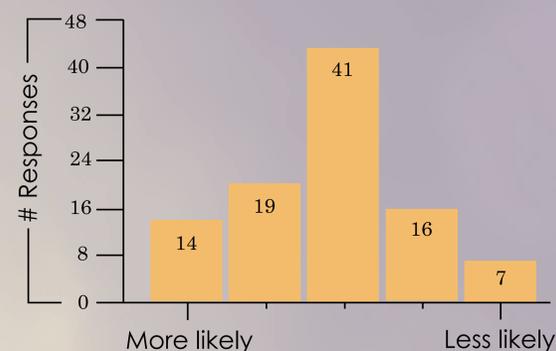
Etext and Textbook Use

Based on analytics, most students (77%) used the optional module, and there was no statistically significant difference in prior GPA comparing users and non-users. Students were also assigned a traditional textbook, and based on self-reports, nearly all (98%) used the traditional text at some point in the term.

Key Findings

Student Views of Etexts

Does an etextbook option make you more or less likely to use a course textbook?



Top categories of Student feedback on etexts

The Module would work best if the layout were more like textbook chapters, organized into discrete sections.
(18 responses)

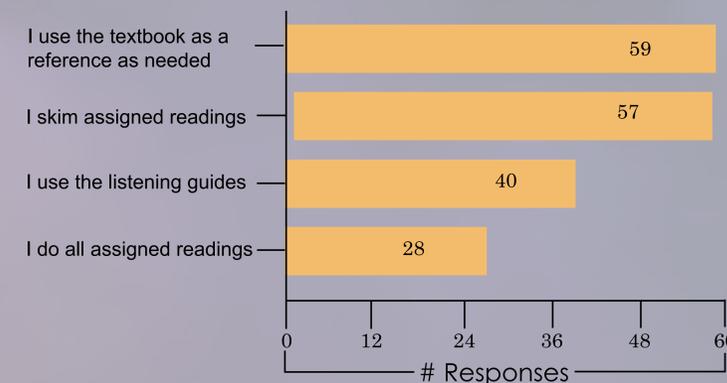
The Module should incorporate more traditional reading.
(18 responses)

The Module should have an easily accessible site map, or table of contents, which clearly lays out material that must be "collected"/retained.
(8 responses)

For etexts, many students favored more traditional textbook features over increased engagement/interaction. They wanted the module to do more to organize and prioritize the presented information for them.

Student Views of Traditional Textbooks

When a course textbook is assigned, how do you use it?



Top categories of Student feedback on textbooks

I use a textbook to:

- *Obtain course fundamentals, making it easier to identify the "right" answers and avoid unreliable online sources.*
(36 responses)
- *Fill gaps in lecture notes.*
(22 responses)
- *Use as a study aid for exams, in conjunction with lecture notes.*
(14 responses)
- *Learn content through getting feedback on graded reading assignments.*
(14 responses)

"Courses need unity and a 'final say' for information, other than the professor's word."

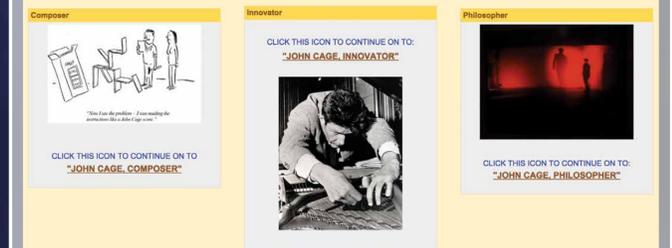
"I find that a good lecture can concisely cover all of the material better through independent, adaptive teaching methods than through a set book, which is often obstinate and uninteresting."

Teaching Approach

Module Use

It is easy to navigate the John Cage module.

It Starts [here](#) with a choice of three entry points: "John Cage, Composer," "John Cage, Innovator," and "John Cage, Philosopher." Organized by theme, each portal represents a bundle of textual explanations, audio music files, and a variety of learning resources that is designed to enhance your understanding of this highly influential musical figure.



Implications for Teaching

A course textbook represents a student's perception of the course as a whole, as opposed to one possible resource for learning course material. Students who consistently expressed an interest in additional support/guidance in their learning often had highly contradictory feelings. They often described "all-purpose" resources as the ideal, repositories of all "need-to-know" class content that also allow for in-depth exploration.

The enjoyment and added value of interactive class materials was often secondary to issues of student preparedness. To make best use of these resources, instructors should carefully consider:

1. Do students understand how to make efficient use of the supplementary resources?
2. Do the supplementary resources allow students to adapt the course to their needs?

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